

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY HELD AT 10.15 AM ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2020 (blended meeting – in Antrim and by zoom)

1. PRESENT

Mrs P Carville	Sir Gerry Loughran
Mr J Craig	Mr N McCausland
Mr G Doran	Mr K Mulvenna
Rev R Herron	Ms S O'Connor
Mr M Johnston	Ms N Toman

2. IN ATTENDANCE

Ms S Long, Mrs M Corkey, Mrs C Duffield, Mr D Hanna, Mr S Wade, Ms L McCall and for part of the meeting Mrs S McCartan, Mr P O'Rawe, and Mr M McDermott.

3. PROTOCOL FOR EA BLENDED AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE MEETINGS

All present were observing the protocol.

4. OFFICE OF CHAIR

On the proposal of Mr Mulvenna, seconded by Mrs Carville, Mr G Doran was elected Chair.

5. APOLOGY

An apology had been received from Mrs M Culbert.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair reminded Members of the requirement to declare interests during the course of the meeting.

7. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 3 MARCH 2020

The Committee agreed the minutes* (FGP/9/20/4) of the meeting held on 3 March 2020 on the proposal of Rev Herron and seconded by Mrs Carville.

8. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

8.1 HR ONLINE (7.1)

Information on online usage would be provided to Members.

8.2 PROCUREMENT AND DELIVERY OF MAINTENANCE AND MINOR WORKS (9.1)

Mr Hanna said that, following completion of the contract's post evaluation exercise, he would provide a report to the Committee on the Member's query.

8.3 DIRECT AWARD CONTRACT – PROCEDURE (9.2)

Mr Hanna said that he was liaising with the Member on procedures concerning Direct Award Contracts. The Member indicated that she would welcome the involvement of Mr Wade in the discussion. This was agreed.

9. FINANCE

2020/21 FINANCIAL REPORT - FOUR MONTHS ENDING JULY 2020

Mr Wade reported that the 2020/21 Initial Budget Plan had been approved by DE on 4 August 2020 subject to a number of considerations. These included compliance with DE's requirements, as set out in its budget allocation letter of 22 May 2020, and that budgetary decisions must be taken to ensure delivery against EA's statutory obligations and the Draft Programme for Government.

Mr Wade presented the financial report, based on information available, as set out in the paper* (FGP/9/20/8.1) including the MEMR* (Appendix 1). He advised that in July EA had received additional allocations amounting to £15.6m (£12.5m for SEN and £3.1m for Rates). He also drew attention to the receipt of £35.689m for Earmarked allocations and £2.480m for Youth Earmarked programmes.

Mr Wade said that, as reported to the Board at its meeting on 6 August 2020, no costs had been included in the financial profile in respect of Education Restart. These costs would be forecast once they were finalised and agreed between EA and DE. He said that the only change to the forecast expenditure in the July MEMR related to the reporting of the receipt of allocations. The July MEMR was therefore reporting an overall estimated funding gap of £77.352m, excluding Earmarked and Youth, and an estimated block grant funding gap of £77.163m after estimated savings of £17.611m. A breakdown of the projected savings was provided. Mr Wade said that, as agreed with DE, savings relating to additional school stock count would not be factored into the financial profile in the current year.

Mr Wade referred to the bids that had been submitted for Education Restart detailing lower and upper range requirements. The Chair of the Board asked for a report to be provided on the detail of the bids submitted for Education Restart and the level of funding supported to date. This was agreed.

The Committee noted the profiled financial position, including the update on the estimated savings for 2020/21, and the actions being taken by officers in working with DE and to address profiled pressures. It noted that EA continued to operate at significant financial risk.

Action: Report to be provided on the detail of the bids submitted for Education Restart and the level of funding supported to date.

10. OPERATIONS AND ESTATES

10.1 COLLABORATIVE CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF NATURAL GAS

Mr Hanna presented a paper* (FGP/9/20/9.1) setting out the details of a CPD collaborative contract across Government departments for the provision of natural gas. The paper included a risk management strategy which set out the governance arrangements for managing a flexible contract. Mr Hanna said that the governance of the procurement would align to EA's arrangements for electricity procurement. This contract had commenced in April 2020 and was effecting savings in schools.

Ms Long said that, within the remit of her delegated authority, she had approved EA's inclusion in the CPD collaborative contract. This information had been presented to the Board as part of a report on the business conducted under delegated authority. The matter was being presented to the Committee for information and discussion.

A Member queried if the collaborative contract could be extended to Grant Maintained and Integrated schools. Mr Hanna undertook to report back on this issue.

The Committee noted the paper, including the risk management strategy document.

Action: Report back on the query regarding the extension of the CPD collaborative contract to GMI schools.

10.2 TENDERS AND LAND AND PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS

Mr Craig entered the meeting at 10.35 am.

The Committee considered the paper* (FGP/9/20/9.2) providing information on tenders for construction works, tenders for goods and services, and land and property transactions.

The following tenders were noted:

- Construction Works - Above Threshold - Approved under Delegated Business: EANI-1951, and CPDC-447.
- Goods and Services - Tenders approved under Delegated Business.
- Construction Works - Below Threshold - Contracts signed and sealed: EANI-1980; EANI-2011; EANI-2018; EANI-2082; EANI-2095; EANI-2108; EANI-2111; EANI-2132; EANI-2133; EANI-2154; EANI-2158; EANI-2161; and EANI-2173.

On the proposal of Rev Herron, seconded by Ms O'Connor, the Committee agreed to recommend that the land and property transactions listed in the paper for the schools identified below should be approved:

- Alexander Dickson Primary School, Ballygowan; Arvalee School and Resource Centre, Omagh; Bellarena Primary School, Llmavady; and Spa Primary School, Ballynahinch.

10.3 MINI MODEL DAY CARE FACILITY, BELFAST

Mr Hanna presented a paper* (FGP/9/20/9.3) setting out the options being considered by DE as part of its review into the future operation of the Mini Model day care centre. EA continued to work with DE to support the review which was due to be completed in the coming weeks. Mr Hanna outlined the consideration given by the Corporate Leadership Team to ensure that all children enrolled at the day care centre, who were eligible for a funded pre-school place in a nursery or other setting in 2020/21, had applied and been offered places. He also outlined the actions that had been taken and were continuing to be taken with regard to the staffing of the day care centre.

In response to a Member's query, Ms Long set out the preferred position of the Board of Governors of Belfast Model School for Girls with regard to the future operation of the day care centre.

A Member drew attention to the background of the North Belfast City Learning Centre (NBCLC). He queried whether an evaluation could be carried out on the NBCLC to provide learning on the project's successes or otherwise. Mr Hanna said that any post project evaluation on the NBCLC would be undertaken by DE. Ms Long said that the Member's query would be raised with DE officials.

A Member said that, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of pre-school and other child care settings had experienced financial difficulties. She pointed out that the Mini Model day care centre had been noted as having a transformational impact on the lives of people in that community.

The Committee noted the report provided on the Mini Model day care centre, including that the DE review was due to complete in the following weeks.

***Action:** Engage with DE officials with regard to a post project evaluation being undertaken, in due course, on the North Belfast City Learning Centre.*

11. HUMAN RESOURCES

11.1 RURAL NEEDS ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

Mr McDermott presented the Rural Needs Annual Report for 2019/20* (FGP/9/20/10.2) which set out EA's compliance to its obligations under The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. Information contained in the report included an overview of EA's duties and responsibilities under the Act, the delivery of key actions and various programmes, and training delivered to EA staff. Appended to the report was a list of the policies that had been screened during the year.

A Member received clarification on the various training sessions provided to EA staff on the Act, including the raising awareness session provided on the Act to an education partner. Mr McDermott advised that the Equality and Diversity Unit made provision for training staff on all EA's obligations every year.

The Chair of the Board drew attention to particular challenges for children with special educational needs in rural areas in terms of specialist provision. She said it was necessary for EA to integrate the supports provided to these families and to factor this into future work.

A Member referred to the work programme to be taken forward by the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission on the non-diminution of rights following Brexit. Mr McDermott said that a conversation had already commenced between EA and the Equality Commission on this matter; however, the Equality Commission's work programme was yet to be agreed.

A Member queried if reference should be made in the report to connectivity issues in rural areas, given the extent of the remote learning which had taken place due to Covid-19. Mr McDermott said that the connectivity issue had impacted on schools and children and young people from the start of the new financial year and the onset of Covid-19. This had been assessed and would feature in the Annual Report for 2020/21.

The Committee noted the 2019/20 Rural Needs Annual Report.

11.2 COMMERCIAL INSURANCE REVIEW 2020-21

Mr O'Rawe said that EA self-insured public liability and employers' liability risk for itself, including controlled schools, and the Catholic Maintained and Irish Medium sectors as part of its statutory maintenance responsibilities. However, commercial insurance policies funded by EA had historically been in place for certain properties including the entirety of the Catholic Maintained sector and the Irish Medium estate. He said that a review of the commercial insurance arrangements had been carried out to ensure that such arrangements going forward would offer the most favourable, appropriate and economically advantageous insurance terms given the current UK insurance climate.

Mr O'Rawe presented a paper* (FGP/9/20/10.2) setting out EA's commercial insurance portfolio arrangements for 2019/20, the appointment of a firm of independent insurance consultants to advise on annual insurance procurement, the risk audit and review

undertaken, the process involving procurement and evaluation, and the placement of insurance and final outcomes, including the benefits obtained for EA.

In response to a Member's query, Mr O'Rawe said that the Committee, at its meeting on 4 February 2020, had approved the arrangements to appoint a firm to provide insurance brokerage and associated services.

The Committee noted the details of the review of the arrangements for commercial insurance arrangements and the benefits obtained for EA, as set out in the paper.

11.3 PUBLIC SECTOR RESOURCING FRAMEWORK

Mrs Duffield provided an update on the implementation of the Crown commercial services Public Sector Resourcing (PSR) framework for agency workers. The decision to implement this framework had been approved by the Committee in January 2020 further to the previous NICS CPD framework being withdrawn at short notice at the end of 2019. Despite some delay to implementation due to Covid19 the framework had gone live for new agency staff requisitions from 1 September 2020.

Mrs Duffield presented a paper* (FGP/9/20/10.3) providing an overview of the benefits of the PSR framework, the hiring manager role, the delivery process, and an update on the next steps of implementation and stabilisation. The framework facilitated timely attraction and engagement of agency workers for corporate posts. Work was being undertaken to support the transition of existing agency workers (where suppliers were already part of the PSR framework) and the migration of workers (where suppliers were not signed up to the PSR framework).

In response to a Member's query, Mrs Duffield advised that all agencies within the framework were compliant with relevant legislation including IR35, Agency worker regulation and GDPR, and that rates of pay were directly aligned to NJC salary scales

A Member queried whether the costs associated with agency workers would increase as a result of the framework. Mrs Duffield said that Procurement was currently carrying out a cost benefit analysis and a report on this matter could be provided to the Committee at a future meeting. She confirmed that rates of pay for agency workers would align to NJC pay scales. The framework would facilitate improved monitoring of the volume and use of agency workers including full transparency of pricing.

In response to a Member's query, Mrs Duffield reported the current number of agency workers employed at the end of July which were registered through the framework. This cohort of staff was employed in services which had short term peaks in demand or where it was necessary to recruit a specific skillset. She said that the education sector depended heavily on a flexible contingent workforce such as in the recruitment of substituteteachers employed through NISTR and the temporary engagement of Classroom Assistants in schools.

The Committee noted the update on the implementation of the PSR framework.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on 6 October 2020 (with the start time to be determined).

The meeting ended at 11.20 am.

Chair

Date

* Paper circulated